

United States Barrack (Pentagon Barracks)
Bounded by North Riverside Mall, Capitol Avenue
Front Street, Spanish Town Road
Baton Rouge
East Baton Rouge Parish
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1134

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. LA-1134

UNITED STATES BARRACKS
(Pentagon Barracks)

Location: Bounded by North Riverside Mall on the east, Capitol Avenue on the north, Front Street on the west, and Spanish Town Road on the south; Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana.

Present Owner: State of Louisiana.

Present Occupant: Various state government agencies and employees.

Present Use: Offices and apartments.

Significance: Situated adjacent to the Mississippi River, the United States Barracks were a significant military post from the 1820s to the 1870s, during which time numerous military and political figures either visited or were stationed there. Arranged in pentagonal shape, the four barracks buildings feature two-story colonnades on two sides.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Construction began in 1819 and was completed in 1824.
2. Architect: Captain James Gadsden, U. S. Army Engineer.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Fergus Duplantier sold the land to the United States Government around 1819. In 1902, by an act of Congress, Louisiana State University was given title to the land. On January 11, 1951, full title to the property was granted to the State of Louisiana.
4. Contractor: The contractor for the barracks was John Hill, but the actual supervision was conducted by Captain Thomas S. Rodgers, Captain John Jones and Captain R. D. Richardson of the First U. S. Infantry. The soldiers of the First U. S. Infantry Regiment did the construction and were paid additional wages and whiskey for their labor.

UNITED STATES BARRACKS
(Pentagon Barracks)
HABS No. LA-1134 (Page 2)

5. Original plan and construction:

Each of the four extant buildings formed one side of the pentagonal design of the compound. The Barracks were described by the U. S. War Department as follows:

"The barracks at the post consisted of two ranges of officers quarters; two ranges of brick barracks for soldiers, each range being 180 by 36 feet, two stories in height, with a piazza on one side, and intended to accommodate eight companies, with their complement of officers."

A fifth side to the pentagonal plan, consisting of two buildings with a common wall, was also built, but because of poor construction, did not stand for very long. By 1829, this building had been demolished. "The building forming the side parallel to the river and intended for the Quartermaster and Commissary Department being of bad material and worse workmanship has been removed. This fortunately leaves open the angle next to the river and affords a fine view and better ventilation than if the original plan had been preserved." (from the records of Dr. B. F. Harney, Post Surgeon, 1840, Sunday Advocate, January 21, 1951.)

The rest of the fort consisted of: "An arsenal, 90 by 36 feet, three stories high; a storehouse 110 by 45 feet, one and a half stories high; a magazine, 55 by 30 feet, one story high, all of brick, and two small workshops....A temporary hospital was also built, which was afterwards replaced by a frame structure." (Walter Fleming, "Louisiana State University 1860-1896", Ph.D. Dissertation, LSU 1936, p. 438.)

6. Alterations and additions:

Circa 1834, two-story galleries on the long sides of the structures were added. In 1966, the buildings were renovated, at which time the interiors were converted into offices and apartments. Each building now has only

UNITED STATES BARRACKS
(Pentagon Barracks)
HABS No. LA-1134 (Page 3)

two chimneys, whereas an early photograph of one of the buildings show four.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

In 1825, Lt. Col. Zachary Taylor, later President of the United States, began the first of his three tours of duty at the post.

In 1861, the State of Louisiana seized the post and turned it over to the Confederacy. During the following year, Federal troops seized the post as part of the campaign culminating in the Battle of Baton Rouge, August 5, 1862. They continued to occupy the Barracks until the end of Reconstruction in 1879.

In 1886, LSU leased the property from the United States Department of the Interior and moved its campus there from Alexandria. In 1902, LSU was given the buildings and grounds by an Act of Congress. When LSU began to move to its new campus in south Baton Rouge, in 1925, the Barracks were first used as a dormitory for co-eds, and then, somewhat later, as apartments for LSU faculty and state employees.

Among the historic figures who have visited the Barracks are the Marquis de Lafayette, General James Wilkinson, Jefferson Davis, Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, General George A. Custer, General James Longstreet, General Nathan Bedford Forrest, General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, and General William T. Sherman.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Conveyance Records, East Baton Rouge Parish, Centroplex.

Fleming, Walter, "Louisiana State University, 1860-1896." Ph.D. Dissertation, LSU, 1936.

Mundinger, John, "The History of the Pentagon Barracks." Term paper, LSU, Spring, 1975.

UNITED STATES BARRACKS
(Pentagon Barracks)
HABS No. LA-1134 (Page 4)

Nomination File for "Pentagon Barracks," located in the State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Capitol Region Planning Commission, Historical Landmarks of the Capitol Region, Land Use Report 2A, July, 1973.

Casey, Powell A. "It Really Was a Pentagon," Baton Rouge Sunday Advocate, August 6, 1972.

City-Parish Planning Commission, Historic Baton Rouge, 1970, revised 1975.

Prepared by John Easterly
Historian
State of Louisiana
Sibyl McCormac Croff
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer, 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The galleries on the Barracks, installed ca. 1835, constitute the earliest and grandest example of the Greek Revival colossal order colonnade in the parish.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: All of the buildings have 12 foot galleries, front and rear, and are 180 feet long. Two of the buildings are 30 feet wide and the remaining two are 24 feet wide. They are nine bays long and two stories tall. The four rectangular

UNITED STATES BARRACKS
(Pentagon Barracks)
HABS No. LA-1134 (Page 5)

buildings are laid out on four sides of a pentagonally shaped court.

2. Foundation: Brick.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The walls are brick laid in common bond with many coats of paint. The current color is rust red.
4. Structural system, framing: The structure is made from cypress beams and joists. The only visible parts are the gallery joists which are three feet on center. Many of these have been replaced.
5. Porches: The most noteworthy feature of the buildings is the colossal Tuscan galleries in the front and rear. Each gallery contains ten columns composed of stucco over brick and has a flat entablature. Despite the fact that the columns are too widely spaced and the entasis is improper, the colonnades are large and boldly formed, creating an overall effect of strength.
6. Chimneys: There are only two chimneys on each building. They are located on the ridgepole and spaced to divide the buildings into thirds.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The French doors have glass panes on top and wooden panels below. Each door is set into slightly recessed arches and flanked by two windows. In addition, each building has an elliptically arched breezeway through the center of the first floor. The doors are diagonal planks with heavy iron fixtures.
 - b. Windows: The windows have nine-over-six-light double-hung sashes on the first floor and six-over-six lights on the second floor.
8. Roof: The low-pitched hipped roofs have parapets which form the entablatures of the colonnades below.

UNITED STATES BARRACKS
(Pentagon Barracks)
HABS No. LA-1134 (Page 6)

C. Description of Interior:

The interior and plans are the results of a 1966 renovation. None of the original fabric of the interior of the buildings remains.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The exterior of the complex is surrounded by parking lots and modern state office buildings. The interior courtyard is landscaped with a row of live oaks in front of each building. The broad, sweeping lawn opens onto the Mississippi River.

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Summer, 1978

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was jointly sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the City of Baton Rouge, Parish of East Baton Rouge, Department of Public Works, Division of Community Development. Under the auspices of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth Anderson, Principal Architect, the project was completed in the summer of 1978 at the HABS field office, Department of Architecture, Louisiana State University. The team was comprised of Sibyl McCormac (Columbia University), project supervisor/historian; Timothy Allanbrook (Rhode Island School of Design), project foreman; architect Kate Johns (Arizona State University); and student architects William J. Graham (University of Maryland), Robert D. Louton (University of Arkansas), and George W. Steinrock, Jr. (University of Detroit).

ADDENDUM TO
UNITED STATES BARRACKS
(PENTAGON BARRACKS)
Riverside Mall, Capitol Avenue
Front Street and Spanish Town Road
Baton Rouge
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